The Effects of Two Different Teaching Methods on EFL Intermediate Listeners

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キーワード：listening strategies, intermediate listeners, EFL

本論では、日本語を母語とする英語学習者の中でも特に、中位層学習者を対象とし、ある２つの学習指導法の効果を検証した。その結果、中位層学習者にはディクテーションに特化した指導法が効果的であるとの結果が得られた。

第１週目に、被験者の選別のためにTOEIC® のリスニング部分のテストを使用し、445点満点中、166 ～ 330 点を取得した者を、本実験の被験者として選別後、3 等分した。CG（統制群）：10 名、DTG（ディクテーション訓練群）：31 名、LSTG（リスニング・ストラテジー訓練群）：24 名。合計 65 名の被験者を得た。

第２～ 14 週の期間、毎週１回 30 分、DTG には、ディクテーションに特化した学習や訓練を、LSTG にはリスニング・ストラテジーに特化した学習や訓練をそれぞれ日本語で指導した。CG の被験者は、通常講義を受講しただけで、何の訓練も指導も受けなかった。

最終週である第 15 週に、被験者の選別に使用したのと同じTOEIC® のリスニング部分のテストを使用し、学習指導法の効果を検証した。その結果、中位層学習者にはディクテーションに特化した指導法が効果的であるとの結果が得られた。

なお、被験者選別の際、答えは一切与えておらず、また 14 週後に再受験させることは被験者には伝えていなかった。

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1 Introduction

1. 1 Background of the Study

Since 1995, I have been teaching listening skills in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) at a university in Japan. During my 15 year tenure, I have observed with increasing concern that the instructional methods in listening skills, both at junior and senior high school levels, have witnessed marginal change since my time as a student during the 1970s and 1980s.

Generally, most first-year university students, at the age 18, have learnt English for at least six years; however, their English listening competence does not reflect the six years of time and effort put into language study. According to the 2011 official TOEIC® report, university students score an average of 304 on the listening test. Maximum score attainable is 445, making the 304 average a dismal 68% score.

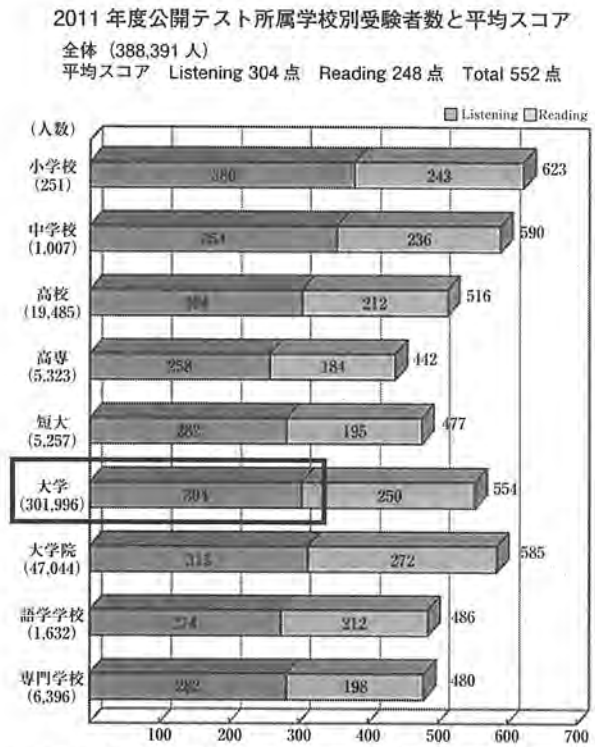


Figure 1: Average score of university students on the listening portion of TOEIC® in 2011

A reason for such dismal scores may be that training focuses only on a particular set of language skills required to pass university entrance examinations—the Grammar

Translation Method. Most learners cannot comprehend texts exclusively by listening, but can do so through reading alone. Until recently, Japanese universities did not mandate English listening comprehension as a criterion for admission. In fact, despite the many initiatives to teach English in Japan, English listening comprehension became mandatory in national universities' entrance examination only in 2006. The listening comprehension score accounts for only 20% of the total test score. This has some determinative relationship with the fact that 68.1% of Japanese learners' English listening remains at an intermediate level (166 ~ 330 on the listening portion of TOEIC®, TOEIC® Official Report, 2011). Moreover, students at Japanese universities complete compulsory English education within two years, unless they major in English. Listening strategy becomes a highly significant factor in the improvement of listening proficiency within a certain limited period. In a strategy training study for second language listening, Vandergrift (1997) finds explicit examples indicating that learners use both metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Additionally, learners demonstrate greater use of metacognitive strategies at higher proficiency levels. Vandergrift proposes a pedagogical method for encouraging the use of metacognitive strategies at *all* proficiency levels. This recommendation is consistent with that of O'Malley, Chamot and Küpper (1989). With these experts' recognised importance providing a framework, this paper focuses on improved methods of teaching listening strategies.

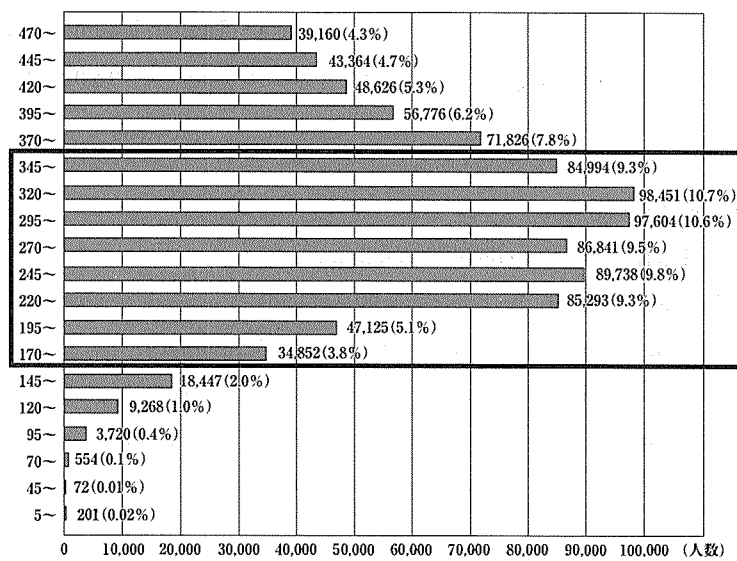


Figure 2: Intermediate score range of the listening portion of TOEIC® in 2011

1. 2 Purpose

This study proposes to raise the levels of English listening comprehension among Japanese learners by examining the effects of two teaching methods on intermediate listeners (ILs)—dictation training (DT) and listening strategies training (LST). This study focuses on ILs for the following reasons: First, past listening-strategy studies focus on more skilled and less skilled listeners with the aim of showing how more skilled listeners outperform their less skilled counterparts (see DeFillippis, 1980; Murphy, 1987; O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper, 1989; Rost and Ross, 1991; Moreira, 1996; Vandergrift, 1997; Goh, 2000; Shirono, 2002; Ueda, 2005; Grahan, Santos and Vanderplank, 2008; and Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari, 2010). ILs and their instructors may find these studies' results useful. However, ILs may not have reached a skill level sufficient to utilise these results. The studies listed above do not focus on ILs, or demonstrate what they lack. Therefore, studies directly focusing on instructional strategies for ILs are necessary.

The second reason that this study focuses on ILs is that in 2011, intermediate-level learners constituted the majority of university students in Japan. In 2011, 301,996 university students answered the TOIEC® achieving an average listening score of 304 out of a possible 445 (Figure 1). In other words, the TOIEC® reported that these students possess intermediate level listening capability. Similarly, approximately 90% of my students are categorised as ILs each year. Every academic year, I administer the listening portion of TOEIC® to all my classes. The test has yielded results consistent with the TOEIC® reports. A study concentrating on methods to improve English listening skills of the majority of Japanese university students –ILs– would therefore be highly practical and beneficial.

1. 3 Definitions of Terms

The terms used in this paper are defined as follows:

Listening: Listening refers to the understanding of spoken English in a non-collaborative situation; the listener's role is only to interpret a speaker's utterance.

Dictation: As used in this study, this term means the act of speaking aloud words and phrases in a sentence and not reading aloud from a text. Thus, listeners cannot use their knowledge of grammar or background context, but only acoustic information to interpret the spoken words and phrases.

Listening strategy/strategies: This term indicates a listener's conscious intention to

manage incoming oral speech, particularly when the listener knows that s/he must compensate for incomplete input or partial understanding (Rost, 2002, p. 236).

Intermediate listeners: This term refers to those whose TOEIC® listening scores range between 166 and 330. Maximum attainable score on the listening portion of TOEIC® is 445.

'Bottom–up' processing: An action or procedure that begins by gathering the smallest items combining them to form holistic ideas; from individual parts to the whole (Lynch and Mendelsohn, 2002).

'Top–down' processing: An action or procedure that begins with broad, global notions and moves towards information units decreasing in size; from the whole to the constituent parts (Lynch and Mendelsohn, 2002).

2 Literature Review

2. 1 Controlled and Automatic Human Information Processing

Schneider and Shiffrin (1977) propose that two cognitive processing types exist in learning—controlled and automatic human information processing. Controlled processes involve a sequence of cognitive activities under active control, to which conscious attention of the subject needs to be drawn. Automatic processes are sequences of cognitive activities that occur automatically without the necessity of active control and usually without conscious attention. This theory is supported by many studies (e.g. Anderson, 1995; Lynch, 1998; Goh, 2000; Buck, 2001). Buck (2001, p. 7) illustrates these two activities by comparing them to learning to drive a car. At first, the whole process is controlled which needs us to pay conscious attention to everything we do. After a while, some parts of the process become relatively more automatic and we begin to do them without conscious thought. Eventually the whole process becomes so automatic that we manage to drive well under normal circumstances, without much thought.

In language learning, dictation is a controlled process ('bottom–up' processing) as it involves the decoding of phonemes. In contrast, from a listening strategies perspective, identification of individual words is an automatic process ('top–down' processing). In other words, the less automatic an activity, the more time required and the more cognitive burden loaded to perform it. When listening takes more time, comprehension suffers. For the purpose of this research, the study participants were assumed *not* to have reached the level at which a sequence of cognitive activities, in this case English listening

comprehension, can occur automatically without conscious attention and the need for active control.

2. 2 A Cognitive Framework of Language Comprehension

Anderson (1995, p. 379) claims that the language learning process contains certain steps. He proposed a cognitive framework of language comprehension with a model including *perception*, *parsing* and *utilisation*. Although these three phases are interrelated, recursive and possibly concurrent, they differ from one another. At the lowest cognitive level of listening, *perception* is the encoding of acoustic input that involves extracting phonemes from a continuous speech stream (Anderson, 1995, p. 37). At the next level, *parsing*, words are transformed into a mental representation of the combined meaning of the words. This occurs when a listener segments an utterance according to syntactic structures or cues to meaning. These segments are then (re)combined to generate a meaningful representation of the original sequence. At the highest level, *utilisation*, a listener may draw upon different types of inferences to complete an interpretation and make it more meaningful or use mental representation to respond to a speaker.

Since dictation is considered to belong to the level of perception—controlled processes—this study's participants were assumed *not* to have reached the level of utilisation or automatic processes. This means that the greater the capacity used for perception in a single listening activity, the less capacity is available for use in utilisation. As previously observed about listening, when perception requires more time and cognitive burden, comprehension suffers.

3 Experiment

3. 1 Hypothesis

As Schneider and Shiffrin (1977) propose, there are two types of information processes—controlled and automatic processes. Dictation is a controlled process, or 'bottom–up' processing, because it involves decoding phonemes. On the other hand, the identification of individual words and listening strategies belongs to automatic processes, or 'top–down' processing. Therefore, this study's participants may find DT more adequate because as ILs they are *not* supposed to have reached the level at which a sequence of cognitive activities occurs automatically.

Based on these two theories, this study hypothesises that DT or 'bottom–up'

processing training would be more effective for ILs than 'top–down' processing training or LST.

3. 2 Method

3. 2. 1 Participants

Sixty-five participants who had been established as ILs were selected by employing the listening portion of TOEIC® during the first lecture in April 2012. These participants were first-year students from the Faculty of Economics at a private university in Japan. They were divided into three groups: 10 in a control group (CG), 31 in a DT group (DTG) and 24 in a LST group (LSTG). CG students belonged were part of a general English class. DTG students belonged were two classes: Half of them were in a listening class and half of them were in a reading class. LSTG students all belonged were reading classes. All classes were part of the regular English curriculum at this faculty. None of the participants' major subject was English.

3. 2. 2 Materials

For DTG, materials were designed on the basis of a textbook by Rost and Stratton (2001). The materials comprised 25 sections concerning various patterns of reductions and contractions (for details, see Appendix 1).

For LSTG, materials were designed by the author to aid in the acquisition of various types of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (for details, see Appendix 2).

3. 2. 3 Procedure

At the beginning of the academic year in April 2012, all the 65 participants were selected during Week 1 of the term. In Week 2, both DTG and LSTG participants were trained for 30 minutes [1] as part of a 90-minute regular class. From Week 2 to 14, this procedure was repeated once a week for 13 weeks. Instructions were given in Japanese.

DTG participants were first informed about what they would learn on that day, after which they listened once to the relevant part of the CD attached to the textbook mentioned above. Then they wrote words filling in the blanks on the textbook's exercise page. Next, the answers were discussed. Further, the participants listened again to the CD

[1] Because a common syllabus and textbook are assigned strictly and inflexibly, 30 minutes were the maximum for the experiment.

while looking at the answers in order to combine written words/phrases with acoustic information. Finally, they listened to the CD again *without* looking at the answers to comprehend the words/phrases purely through acoustic information.

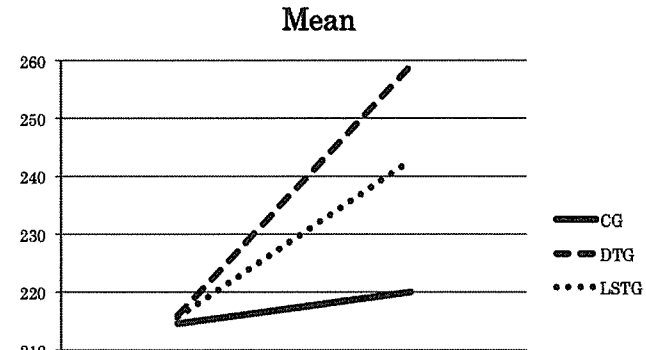
LSTG participants were first instructed on the logical aspects of the listening strategies for that day. They undertook some listening tasks that involved application the instructed listening strategies, after which answers and feedback were provided.

In Week 15, all the participants answered the listening portion of TOEIC®. Although this was the same form of test as the one in April, the participants had neither been provided any answers from that test, nor told that the same form of the test would be used in Week 15. Thus, the test's validity was guaranteed and the scores obtained in Weeks 1 and 15 were compared.

3. 3 Results

3. 3. 1 Pre and Post Mean Scores for CG, DTG and LSTG

DTG obtained the highest mean score of 259.93 on the listening portion of TOEIC®.



	Before	After
CG	214.5	220
DTG	215.97	259.03
LSTG	215.63	242.71

Figure 3. Pre and Post mean scores for the listening portion of TOEIC® for CG, DTG and LSTG

3. 3. 2 ANOVA

ANOVA was conducted in accordance with the null hypothesis; the difference between the two teaching methods was significant. A significant difference was observed between the two test performances in Weeks 1 and 15. Significant differences were

observed between the CG and DTG groups.

Table 1. Table of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

source	SS	df	MS	F	p
A[2]	7146.93	2	3573.46	2.45	0.0945+
error[S(A)]	90377.92	62	1457.71		
B[3]	16451.36	1	16451.36	35.87	0.0000****
AB	6130.04	2	3065.02	6.5	0.0027***
error [BS(A)]	29251.1	62	471.79		

+p < .10, *p < .05, **p< .01, ***p < .005, ****p < .001

Table 2. Means on Factor A (Ryan's method)

	1.CG	2. DTG	3. LSTG
mean	220.000	259.032	242.708
n	10	31	24

pair	r	nominal level	t	p	sig.
2-1	3	0.0166667	3.455	0.0007528	s.
2-3	2	0.0333333	1.933	0.0555212	n.s.
3-1	2	0.0333333	1.942	0.0543529	n.s.

MSe = 964.750152, df = 124, significance level = 0.050000

3. 4 Discussion

Since DTG scored the highest mean after the experiment and there was a significant difference between CG and DTG, it can be inferred that training that focuses on 'bottom–up' processing, like DT, is more effective for ILs than training which focuses on 'top–down' processing, like LSTG.

In addition, this result coincides with the theories of Schneider and Shiffrin (1977) and Anderson (1995), that is, information processing and the language learning process consist of gradual steps and levels. Presumably, ILs are at an early step in information processing and the language learning process. Therefore, it seems logical that DTG performed better in the post-test. The result of the statistical analysis suggests that ILs have not yet reached the stage where a training method that focuses on a top–down processing, such as LSTG, will be effective.

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[2] A = Teaching Methods (Control Group/Dictation Training/Listening Strategy Training)
[3] B = Before & After Experiment

4 Conclusions and Suggestions

For ILs, the statistical analysis indicated that focusing on 'bottom–up' processing, such as DT, is more effective than focusing on 'top–down' processing, such as LSTG (with 30 minutes training provided once weekly, in the participants' first language). The time period used in this experiment—30 minutes, once a week, for 13 weeks—can be taken up by most English lessons at any university in Japan.

At the same time, however, this study suggests a number of avenues for further research. First, to gain reliability and validity for the results above, this experiment should be replicated. Second, replications should employ more participants, especially in CG. Third, it would be interesting to compare other training methods using CG, DTG, LSTG and DT & LSTG, which combines dictation and listening strategies. A new experiment due to launch in April 2013 is planned by the author.

Appendix 1: Contents of the DTG procedure

Wk 2	Lesson 2: Lesson 1: Reduction of "and/or"
Wk 3	Lesson 3: Contraction of "be-verbs"
	Lesson 4: Contraction of "will"
Wk 4	Lesson 5: Contraction of "have/has"
	Lesson 6: Contraction of "would"
Wk 5	Lesson 7: Contraction of "had/had better"
	Lesson 8: Contraction of "not"
Wk 6	Lesson 9: Reduction of "h" in the words which begins with h
	Lesson 10: Reduction of "them/him"
Wk 7	Lesson 11: Reduction of "~ing"
	Lesson 12: Reduction of "(be) going to/ want to/ have to"
Wk 8	Lesson 13: Reduction of "be-verbs" in interrogative sentences
	Lesson 14: Reduction of "be-verbs" in Wh-questions
Wk 9	Lesson 15: Reduction of "don't/doesn't/didn't" in affirmative sentences
	Lesson 16: Reduction of "Do/Does" in interrogative sentences
Wk 10	Lesson 17: Reduction of "Did" in interrogative sentences
	Lesson 18: Reduction of "do/does" in Wh-questions
Wk 11	Lesson 19: Reduction of "did" in Wh-questions
	Lesson 20: Reduction of "Do/Does/Did" in negative-interrogative sentences

Wk 12	Lesson 21: Reduction of "Have/Has" in interrogative sentences
	Lesson 22: Reduction of "have/has" in affirmative sentences
Wk 13	Lesson 23: Reduction of "auxiliary verbs" in interrogative sentences
	Lesson 24: Reduction of "auxiliary verb & have/has/had + past participles" in affirmative sentences
Wk 14	Lesson 25: Omission of "Do/Does/Did/be-verbs" in interrogative sentence

Appendix 2: Contents of the LSTG procedure

Wk 2	• Content words → Stressed in general • Function words → NOT stressed in general
Wk 3	• Working memory • Note taking strategy
Wk 4&5	• Inferential ability
Wk 6	• Discourse markers
Wk 7	• Background knowledge
Wk 8	• Inference : power of a title + background knowledge
Wk 9	• Vocabulary/Visual information
Wk 10&11	• Scanning
Wk 12&13	• Skimming
Wk 14	• Listening literacy

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the participants in the study. I also would like to thank anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions.

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